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RADICAL ANTIPHILOSOPHY

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1.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Alain Badiou's ongoing plea for the return or the continued possibility of philosophy today – over and against the common arguments for its end, exhaustion, or overcoming – is a forceful attempt to redefine the philosopher's adversaries or rivals. Among these, we obviously can find contemporary versions of the sophists, or those who make up the tradition of what Badiou, in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, calls the "great modern sophistics."[1] In many ways this diatribe against the sophists of our time – including Friedrich Nietzsche or Ludwig Wittgenstein as the "major" figures and Richard Rorty or Gianni Vattimo as "minor" ones – is what we would come to expect from a self-proclaimed Platonist: "The young Plato knew that he had to go beyond the subtle wrangling of sophistry as well as be educated by it about the essence of the questions of his time. The same holds true for us."[2] Philosophy cannot reassert its systematic possibility without also drawing a line of demarcation between itself and that which is not philosophy but resembles it or competes with it on the marketplace of ideas. What is more, such a demarcation rarely involves a serene intellectual "exchange" or "debate" of the kind favored, no matter how hypocritically, in our current academic and political climate. Instead, there is an element of anger that is constitutive of philosophy in this regard, to the extent that,

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[1] Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 98 (trans. modified). I translate *sophistique* as "sophistics" rather than as the more commonplace but also more strictly pejorative "sophistry," following extant translations of Barbara Cassin's now classical study, *L'Effet sophistique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1995.

[2] *Ibid*.

as Badiou says in a talk on Jacques Lacan, "the antisophistic argumentative rage constitutes the 'tumos' of philosophy, i.e., its core of polemical anger, since its origin."[3] Badiou thus proposes that philosophy – which positively would be defined, since at least Descartes, by the configuration of being, truth, and subject – also reaffirm itself negatively, so to speak, by bringing Plato's canonical attacks against the sophists up to date with our own time: "Just as, for the major sophists, there have been a *Gorgias* and a *Protagoras*, so too must there be a *Nietzsche* and a *Witgenstein*. And, for the minor sophists, a *Vattimo* and a *Rorty*. Neither more nor any less polemical, neither more nor any less respectful."[4] In addition to the sophists, and partially overlapping with them, though, the adversaries of philosophy in the way Badiou seeks to reground it with one more step in the configuration of being, truth, and subject, also include a long and respectable series of so-called "antiphilosophers."

Badiou as a matter of fact spent four years of his seminar in Paris, between 1992 and 1996, which is to say shortly after the systematic reassertion of philosophy in *Being and Event* (1988) and the accompanying volumes *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1989) and *Conditions* (1992), to a sustained investigation into the formal criteria that might help us identify the protocols of antiphilosophy over and against the claims of philosophy itself. The guiding term and the immediate targets of this investigation obviously are borrowed from Lacan who in turn, in the mid-1970s, had called himself an antiphilosopher after the example of eighteenth-century *antiphilosophes*, a self-applied label that historically refers to the mostly religious and conservative, if not outright reactionary, thinkers who resist the arrival of rationalism, deism, or materialism on the part of French Enlightenment thinkers, the so-called *philosophes*, such as Diderot, Voltaire, or d'Holbach. It must be said that none of the original *antiphilosophes* are even remotely known today, let alone read, except by a handful of specialists.[5] From the point of view of the history of ideas but also for the purposes of France's intellectual self-image, we could say that the *philosophes* completely gained the upper hand, to the detriment of

[3] Alain Badiou, "Lacan et Platon: le mathème est–il une idée?" in : *Lacan avec les philosophes*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1991, p. 136. This article is published in a shorter and slightly modified version as "L'Antiphilosophie: Lacan et Platon," in *Conditions*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1992, pp. 306–26. The quoted fragment does not appear in this shorter version.

[4] Badiou, "Le (re)tour de la philosophie *elle–même*," *Conditions*, p. 77; English version as "The (Re)turn of Philosophy *Itself*," in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, p. 137.

[5] See, above all, Didier Masseau, *Les ennemis des philosophes: L'antiphilosophie au temps des Lumières*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2000.

figures such as the Abbé Chaudon (author of a *Dictionaire anti-philosophique*, 1767) or Augustin Barruel (author of the antirevolutionary *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme*, 1797-1799). Within the proud tradition of French thought, which basks in the self-proclaimed clarity of enlightened reason, there is thus something utterly scandalous in the mere reinvocation of the antiphilosophical label on the part of someone like Lacan.

Lacan himself, it must also be said, has only very few words to spare, and even then typically enigmatic or esoteric ones, to explain what he means with his recourse to the term "antiphilosophy" to define his own relation, or nonrelation, to philosophy.[6] In "Perhaps at Vincennes," in 1975, he briefly suggests to the analysts of his School that they train themselves not only in linguistics, logic, or topology but also in antiphilosophy: "Which is the title I would gladly give to the investigation of what the university discourse owes to its supposed 'educational' function. It is not the history of ideas, so sad, that will get to the end of this."[7] In the process, philosophy gets reduced, via its association with the university discourse, to the level of stupidity, or *bêtise*, from whose profound slumber only the discourse of the analyst, with its strict particularity, can awaken us: "A patient anthology of the stupidity that characterizes it will allow, I hope, to put it into relief with regard to its indestructible root, its eternal dream. From which there is no awakening except one that is particular."[8]

As late as in 1980, while in the midst of his School's dissolution (which Badiou for the case in question will consider a supreme – if not the only – example of the antiphilosophical act), Lacan still feels the need forcefully to reassert his antiphilosophical allegiance, albeit in terms that are no less enigmatic or sparse than five years earlier. "This Mister Aa is an antiphilosopher," Lacan says with a reference to a text by Tristan Tzara: "That is my case. *I rise up in revolt*, so to speak, against philosophy. What is sure is that it is something finite and done with. Even if I expect some rejects to grow out

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[6] For three fairly different accounts of Lacan's antiphilosophy, all posterior to Badiou's talk at the conference *Lacan avec les philosophes*, see Jean–Claude Milner, "L'antiphilosophie," *L'Oeuvre claire: Lacan, la science, la philosophie*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1995, pp. 146–158; François Regnault, L'antiphilosophie selon Lacan," *Conférences d'esthétique lacanienne*, Paris, Agalma, 1997, pp. 57–80; and Colette Soler, "Lacan en antiphilosophe," *Filozofski Vestnik* 27, 2, 2006, pp. 121–144. See also Slavoj Žižek's remarks, openly influenced by François Regnault, in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London and New York, Verso, 1999, pp. 250–251.

[7] Jacques Lacan, "Peut–être à Vincennes," *Autres écrits*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2001, p. 314.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 315.

of it. Such regrowths are common enough with finite things."[9] Yet aside from these instances, as François Regnault points out, it seems that no further explicit mentions of the term are to be found in Lacan's published work.

Given this sparseness, Badiou's purpose in returning to Lacan's suggestions therefore also carries with it a task of formal explicitation and systematization. For a while, he even seems to have toyed with the idea of composing an entire book on the topic, but this project has not come to fruition, at least not or not yet in French. Instead, we are left with a small number of brief references scattered throughout Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy*, *Conditions* and *Logics of Worlds* as well as more substantial essays on Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan himself as the three great modern antiphilosophers. To each of these three, as I hinted at above, a year-long seminar was devoted from which some unofficial notes and transcriptions are now also available on-line. Finally, Badiou's well-known book on Saint Paul, based as it is on a seminar from the same series, should be considered as part of this project as well: "Paul is a major figure of antiphilosophy."[10] Indeed, the Apostle's perceived "folly" during his visit to Athens, which according to the Acts seems to have provoked only laughter on the part of the philosophers in the Aeropagus (mostly Stoics and Epicureans who look upon the idea of the resurrection of the dead with utter disbelief), stands out as one of antiphilosophy's most vivid ancient models and explains why Badiou feels the urge to compare Paul throughout his book to the likes of Pascal, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan.

2.

Badiou's understanding of antiphilosophy, in other words, is not limited to the otherwise already quite difficult, if not impossible reconstruction of Lacan's usage of the term. Instead, the category emerges as the name for a longstanding tradition of thinkers who, with regard to the dominant philosophical trends of their time, situate themselves in the strange topological position of an "outside with," or of an "internal exteriority" – what Lacanians might prefer to designate with the term "extimacy" – in an attitude that typically oscillates between distance and proximity, admiration and blame, seduction and scorn.

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[9] Lacan, "Monsieur A," *Ornicar?*, 21–22, summer 1980, p. 17.

[10] Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 17.

A minimal list of antiphilosophical thinkers thus includes not only Saint Paul ("Basically, what gets him into difficulty in Athens is his antiphilosophy"[11]), Nietzsche ("Nietzsche assigns to philosophy the singular task of having to reestablish the question of truth in its work of rupture from meaning. Which is why I would call him a 'prince' of contemporary antiphilosophy"[12]), the early Wittgenstein ("The later work – which moreover is not a work since Wittgenstein had to good taste of not publishing anything from it – slides from antiphilosophy into sophistics"[13]), or Lacan ("I call a contemporary philosopher one who has the unfaltering courage to go through Lacan's antiphilosophy"[14]) but also Pascal ("Pascal, that other great figure of antiphilosophy, [...] he who explicitly opposes the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the God of the philosophers and scientists"[15]), if not already Heraclitus ("I would say from Heraclitus, who is as much the antiphilosopher to Parmenides as Pascal is to Descartes"[16]), Rousseau ("Rousseau communicates with our time (let's say, after Nietzsche) by way of his inflexible antiphilosophy"[17]), Kierkegaard ("The exemplary antiphilosopher that Pascal is for/against Descartes, and Rousseau for/against Voltaire and Hume, Kierkegaard, we know, is for/against Hegel"[18]), and perhaps Marx, Freud, and Althusser ("Here we observe that the antiphilosophical act comes down to tracing a line of demarcation, as Althusser would have said following Lenin. And it is very well possible that Althusser's project, under the name of 'materialist philosophy,' came close to twentieth-century antiphilosophy"[19]). For my part, I would add to this list the name of Slavoj

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[12] Badiou, *Casser en deux l'histoire du monde?*, Paris, Le Perroquet, 1992, p. 24. This talk, together with Badiou's texts on Wittgenstein and Lacan, will be collected and translated into English in a single volume under the title *What Is Antiphilosophy?*, ed. and trans. Bruno Bosteels, Durham, Duke University Press, forthcoming. A shorter version of Badiou's talk on Nietzsche also appeared as "Who Is Nietzsche?," trans. Alberto Toscano, *PLI: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 11, 2001, pp. 1–11.

[13] Badiou, *Logiques des mondes,* Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2006, p. 566.

[14] Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 196. See also the following remark in *Logiques des mondes*, where Lacan is credited for upholding the notion of the subject against its Heideggerian critics, without lapsing into humanism: "This is why the traversing of Lacan's antiphilosophy remains even today an obligatory exercise for those who seek to tear themselves free from the reactive convergences of religion and scientism" (p. 548).

[15] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 47.

[16] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté: L'antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein," *BARCA! Poésie, Politique, Psychanalyse*, 3, 1994, p. 14.

[17] Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 575.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 447.

[19] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 17.

Žižek ("Monsieur Zz antiphilosophe," if I were to parody Tzara's dadaist gesture), probably the greatest living antiphilosopher of our times (in the words of Fredric Jameson: "Clearly, the parallax position is an anti-philosophical one, for it not only eludes philosophical systemisation, but takes as its central thesis the latter's impossibility"[20]). Finally, in France, there is the example of Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, who combines antiphilosophy and pop philosophy in a mixture of antiacademic slang, pornography, and speculative theory comparable only to Žižek ("One could also say that he attempts a juncture between the structuralist (and Maoist) generation of the late sixties and his own generation, brought up – as he affirms – on pornography, wandering, and unworking"[21]). The case of Heidegger, on the other hand, presents a harder nut to crack, as Badiou does not consider him an antiphilosopher (in spite of which Peter Hallward asserts that "Heidegger himself, of course, is most easily read as an antiphilosophical thinker"[22]), for reasons that will become clearer in what follows.

What Badiou's engagement with antiphilosophy is certainly *not* meant to be, even though his lists sometimes may give this impression, is a mere contribution to the history of philosophy – as though it were a matter of seeking out the antiphilosopher that accompanies each of the great philosophers as their shadowy double: Heraclitus to Parmenides, Saint Paul to the Athenians, Pascal to Descartes, Kierkegaard to Hegel, Žižek to Badiou himself, and so on. Rather, I would say that its usefulness lies, on one hand, in the specific readings the angle of antiphilosophy allows us to offer in the case of individual thinkers and, on the other, in the efficacy of these insights when they are put to work beyond the frame of reference in which they are first developed. In many cases, this may take one into areas of thought that we would not automatically associate with the question of where to draw the line of demarcation between philosophy and antiphilosophy. Thus, not only am I convinced that someone like Jorge Luis Borges can be read fruitfully as an antiphilosopher, but in my eyes this is even the only way to account

[20] Fredric Jameson, "First Impressions" (review of *The Parallax View* by Slavoj Žižek), *London Review of Books*, 28.17, 2006.

[21] Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 550. See, in particular, Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, *Événement et répétition*, Auch, Tristram, 2004, which is a good example of an antiphilosophical treatment of a single book of philosophy, Badiou's own *Being and Event*, in terms of its effects on the listening and reading subject; and with Philippe Nassif, *Pop philosophie: entretiens*, Paris, Denoël, 2005.

[22] Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 20. The entire section "Anti–antiphilosophy," like everything else in Hallward's book, provides an essential and systematic reference point, even though I do not agree with some of my dear friend's interpretations.

for the tension between Borges's undeniable philosophical interests and his otherwise no less intense mockery of philosophy's systematic ambitions.[23]

I would go one step further so as to formulate the hypothesis that today the dominant philosophical attitude is in fact thoroughly antiphilosophical in nature, even if the label itself is not always used or accepted. To be more precise, if philosophy today can pretend to be radical then this is in no small part due to its antiphilosophical tendencies. Whence the interest, but also the difficulty, of Badiou's attempt to disentangle the two. In fact, in times of near-global reaction, it is not surprising that there should be such a strong push for an antiphilosophical act that claims to be less illusory yet also more radical than the philosophical pursuit of truth. Antiphilosophy, in this sense, contributes to an ever more powerful political maximalism (even Wittgenstein, after all, is capable of proclaiming himself a communist), which actually fills in for a missing emancipatory articulation.[24]

3.

What are then some of the fundamental characteristics that would make antiphilosophy into a relatively coherent tradition in its own right? Based on his detailed readings of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan, as well as the occasional references to Pascal, Kierkegaard, or Rousseau, Badiou distinguishes a small number of basic features as the invariant core of any antiphilosophy. At least for the modern period, these invariant traits include the following: the assumption that the question of being, or that of the world, is coextensive with the question of language; consequently, the reduction of truth to being nothing more than a linguistic or rhetorical effect, the outcome of historically and culturally specific language games or tropes which therefore must be judged and, better yet, mocked in light of a critical-linguistic, discursive, or genealogical analysis; an appeal to what lies just beyond language, or rather at the upper limit of the sayable, as a domain of meaning, sense, or knowledge, irreducible to any form of truth as defined in philosophy; and, finally, in order to gain access to this domain, the search for a radical act such as the religious leap of faith or the revolutionary breaking in

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[23] See my essay "Borges as Antiphilosopher," *Borges escritor del siglo XXI*, ed. Silvia N. Barei and Christina Karageourgou-Bastea, special issue of *Vanderbilt e-Journal of Luso-Hispanic Studies*, 3, 2006, pp. 23–31, from where I will freely draw in what follows.

[24] The present study in this sense continues and expands my argument from "The Speculative Left," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 104.4, 2005, pp. 751–767.

two of the history of the world, the sheer intensity of which would discredit in advance any systematic theoretical or conceptual elaboration.

These features of thought (or of intellection, since in the eyes of some to speak of "thought" with regard to the operations in question might be to grant too much to philosophy) tend to push the antiphilosopher, respectively, in the directions of nominalism or constructivism, sophistics, mysticism, and various forms of (political, religious, artistic, or even scientific and amorous) radicalism. Of course, not all antiphilosophers share these features in their totality, or not to the same extent. Thus, for example, whereas Nietzsche's filiation with the sophists is quite open and explicit in his work, there are certainly many theses in Lacan's conception of truth and meaning that bring him closer to an antisophistic stance which every contemporary philosopher for Badiou would have to traverse – just as even the early Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of propositional truths, for example scientific ones, in the way sophists would, even if his ultimate aim is to move beyond mere propositional sense.

Similar caveats no doubt would have to be introduced specific to each antiphilosopher in terms of which traits are given primacy to the detriment of others. In fact, beyond the varying degrees of proximity to the sophists, the tension between the first two of the features just enumerated and the last two produces a characteristic vacillation that, even within the work of a single antiphilosophical thinker, can range from a purely constructivist viewpoint, which reduces truth to what can be discerned in the existing language systems, all the way to the yearning for a quasi-mystical beyond, which would point toward the other side of language.

The key point, however, is to understand how these features both hang together and contradict each other, providing various narratives or thought-scenarios for moving back and forth amongst them:

1. Antiphilosophers, particularly those modern ones who think in the wake of the linguistic turn after Wittgenstein or Ferdinand de Saussure, first of all tend to reduce the limits of our world to the limits of our language. This is their constructivist or nominalist side, which resolutely submits the question of being to the sovereignty of language: "For it is still not saying enough to say that the concept is the thing itself, which a child can demonstrate against the Scholastics. It is the world of words that creates the world of things."[25] All descriptions of the world, far from being truthful propositions that would correspond to a given state of things, thus turn out to be

[25] Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, New York, Norton, 2001, p. 229.

purely linguistic classifications that are as arbitrary and conjectural as they are unavoidable.

We might rephrase this first major premise behind contemporary antiphilosophy by asserting that nominalism from this point of view is the untranscendable horizon of our time. This means that we cannot even imagine anymore what it means to be a realist, in the sense of the Scholastic debates: "Now, like the spontaneous and bewildered prose-speaker of comedy, we all do nominalism *sans le savoir*, as if it were a general premise of our thought, an acquired axiom. Useless, therefore, to comment on it."[26] For the purposes of antiphilosophy, specifically, nominalism is above all a source of critical and polemical leverage. It is what gives antiphilosophers the necessary impetus, each in his own way, to go against the great cornerstones of Western metaphysics: time, the self or ego, the universe, God. Once these notions are submitted to the razor-sharp edge of a nominalist critique, they turn out to be little more than linguistic constructs: the effects of a grammatical slippage, an unfounded backward inference, or a fortunate or ill-conceived rhetorical turn of phrase. As a result, philosophy is considered to be not just refuted or mistaken but put on display as a threatening monstrosity: an illness for Nietzsche, chatter and nonsensical verbiage exhibiting itself as sense for Wittgenstein, stupidity and rascalness for Lacan.

The diagnostic of philosophy as illness, though, proceeds by way of a painstaking linguistic and discursive analysis of the statements and truth-claims of the philosopher. From this, we can easily see why there exists such a close proximity between the antiphilosopher and the sophist. For example, in the case of Nietzsche's genealogical work:

> Its principle is common knowledge: to bring back every statement to the type that sustains its stating. This is a distribution that in my eyes is typically sophistic between the philological examination of the statements, on one hand, and the register of power, on the other. The method consists in determining with the greatest rigor the corpus of discursive figures, in such a way so as to link them genealogically to the power-type that sustains them. Nietzsche, in this work, shows a great virtue which is the combination of a kind of grammarian's probity on one hand and a powerful doctrine of forces on the other. With, as its fundamental target, the category of truth.[27]

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[26] Jorge Luis Borges, "A History of Eternity," *Selected Non–Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, New York, Penguin, 2000, p. 135.

[27] Badiou, *Casser en deux l'histoire du monde?*, p. 17.

It is not enough, however, to submit all the major philosophical categories to a type of discourse analysis; the very enterprise of the pursuit of truth as such must also be put down, discredited, and gotten rid of: "Henceforth, it is no longer even possible to discuss philosophy; one must declare its *effective* expiration, along with that of every figure of mastery."[28]

2. The sovereign grasp of language on being or substance, indeed, leads above all to an unforgiving destitution of truth as the central category of philosophy. If there is no escape from the prison-house of language, then truth can only be a linguistic or rhetorical effect – the felicitous or infelicitous outcome of certain language games. No doubt more familiar to readers of the early Nietzsche from the so-called *Philosopher's Book*, particularly as seen through the lens of Paul de Man, this reduction of logic to rhetoric is the side of antiphilosophers that makes them nearly indistinguishable from ancient or modern sophists. We could sum this up by referring to the way in which Borges, after rightly attributing to Nietzsche the thesis that "the important consideration is the change an idea can cause in us, not the mere formulation of it," in a footnote offers one of the more striking summaries of the sophistic premise behind antiphilosophy, whose echoes can be heard in the rumble of deconstruction many decades later:

> Reason and conviction differ so much that the gravest objections to any philosophical doctrine usually pre-exist in the work that declares it. In the *Parmenides* Plato anticipates the argument of the third man which Aristotle will use to oppose him; Berkeley (*Dialogues*, 3) anticipates the refutations of Hume.[29]

To be sure, logic and rhetoric are not equated in this footnote; on the contrary, their radical difference is affirmed. However, one of the consequences of this affirmation of difference is nonetheless a devaluation of pure logic, or reason, in favor of the persuasive force of conviction of an argument. In fact, so much weight is given to the effects of language and the change they can produce in a subject that the principle of non-contradiction, cornerstone of classical logic if ever there was one, no longer applies even within some of

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[28] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 58.

[29] Borges, "Note on Walt Whitman," *Other Inquisitions*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1964, p. 71. See also Badiou's comment in his contribution to the conference *Lacan avec les philosophes*: "We could certainly ask ourselves if the infinite referral which Lacan talks about is not indicated by Plato himself in the anticipation he presents of the argument of the third man," in "Lacan et Platon: le mathème est–il une idée?" p. 143.

the most canonical of philosophical works, which consequently contain the seeds for their very own refutation or auto-deconstruction.

3. When taken to an extreme, this privileging of rhetoric over logic, of the saying over the said, can easily lend the argument a miraculous or quasi-mystical overtone. Indeed, if what really matters is the subjective (existential or therapeutic or revolutionary) change an idea can produce in us, and if this effect is beyond the scope of mere logical (philosophical or conceptual) formulation, then it is hard to resist the temptation to find alternative modes of access to this domain of meaningfulness or sense. Or, to put this differently, no sooner do we posit the coincidence of the limits of my world and the limits of my language than the question arises of knowing what lies beyond or beneath these limits, which alone is what really matters. This is the question that paradoxically opens a path in antiphilosophy from constructivism toward mysticism, at once contradicting the principle according to which reality is a verbal, linguistic, or discursive construct. There then seems to be a dimension of reality, or perhaps it would be better to say a dimension of the real, that forever remains beyond the scope of language or conceptual knowledge and, as such, resists symbolization absolutely.

Thus arises the notion, common to all antiphilosophers, of an essential leftover or remainder, which breaks with the coextensiveness of language and the world:

> This idea of the "remainder" can be found in every antiphilosophy, which builds very subtle networks of relations only so as to track down the incompleteness in them, and to expose the remainder to its seizing in the act. This is precisely where antiphilosophy destitutes philosophy: by *showing* that which its poor theoretical pretension has missed, and which is nothing less, in the end, than the real. Thus for Nietzsche, life is that which appears as a remainder of every protocol of evaluation. Just as for Pascal Grace is entirely subtracted from the order of reasons, for Rousseau, the voice of conscience from the preachings of the Enlightenment, for Kierkegaard existence from the Hegelian synthesis. And for Lacan, we know that the philosopher neither can nor wants to know anything of enjoyment and the Thing to which it is yoked.[30]

Incidentally, Badiou adds a long remark to this logic of the real qua

[30] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 23. The last line, of course, also may serve to account for Žižek's rapport to Badiou.

remainder in order to question the misogynist terms in which it is almost always couched:

> What remains to be seen, though, is whether of this real the antiphilosopher offers us anything else than a shattering vanishing act, or whether this act is not, like woman for Claudel, a promise that cannot be kept. Unless it is a question of woman all along in this story, precisely woman about whom we will immediately agree that philosophy has no ambition whatsoever to speak, but about whom we can also wonder whether to this day, displayed as she is in the series of nouns (faith, anxiety, life, silence, enjoyment…) with which antiphilosophy – with the exception of Lacan – has pinned her down, she has done any better than to disappear. The antiphilosopher would wave the specter of the feminine in front of the eyes of the philosopher who, loyally, forecloses this specter from his thinking manoeuvre, educated on this point by science. This goes a long way toward explaining something of the striking misogyny of all antiphilosophers: the unconscious woman serves them only to pin some banderillas on the thick neck of the philosopher. Which is, after all, an explanation "among men." Have we ever seen more detestable people, in their explicit declarations about women, than Pascal (did he ever observe one, other than his sister?), Rousseau (*Emile*'s Sophie!), Kierkegaard (the neurosis of marriage!), Nietzsche (let's not even go there) or Wittgenstein (with the half-frankness of a half-homosexuality)? Supposing that from the point of view of desire the real remainder of philosophical theories must be sought after on the side of the feminine, the *fate* reserved for this remainder is certainly more enviable when one is called Plato, Descartes or Hegel. To the point where we could make of the relationship to women a distinctive criterion: the more flagrant the misogyny, the more we are in the vicinity of antiphilosophy.[31]

We could thus affirm that misogyny, without forming a separate invari-

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 23–24. This allows Badiou to define Kant's place in the philosophy/antiphilosophy debate: "This would also shed an intense light on the case of Kant, whose declarations about women are hairraising, and whose tortuous goal can easily be summarized as follows: to give a philosophical form to antiphilosophy itself. To show philosophically that the philosophical pretension can only stir up air. To sublimate the moral act, which is undoubtedly a-philosophical, with regard to the phenomenal miseries of knowledge. From which we can infer, since for him the remainder bears the name 'noumenon,' that a Kantian desire always addresses a noumenal object. This is, strongly conceptualized, the old certitude of the 'mystery' of the feminine. In Wittgensteinian language, 'woman' is that of which we cannot speak, and which we must therefore pass over in silence" (*ibid.*, p. 24).

ant trait, nonetheless constitutes a derivatory feature that follows in particular from the antiphilosophical logic of the remainder, or of the not-all.

The narrative potential of this tension between linguistic constructivism and the notion of the indivisible remainder can easily be illustrated. Some of Borges's most canonical fictions, for example, revolve around the gap between language and its incommunicable, obscene, or simply eternal other side. "A Yellow Rose," a short prose piece from *Dreamtigers* (*El hacedor*) thus tells of the revelation that befalls Giambattista Marino on the eve of his death, in an illumination that Homer and Dante may have achieved as well:

> Then the revelation occurred: Marino *saw* the rose as Adam might have seen it in Paradise, and he thought that the rose was to be found in its own eternity and not in his words; and that we may mention or allude to a thing, but not express it; and that the tall, proud volumes casting a golden shadow in a corner were not – as his vanity had dreamed – a mirror of the world, but rather one thing more added to the world.[32]

This fragment, furthermore, names some of the basic operations that are involved in dealing with the purely worldly realm and that which for the antiphilosopher lies beyond the worldly, or at its outer edges. As if to follow in the footsteps of Wittgenstein, perhaps by way of Mallarmé, Borges thus draws a sharp line of demarcation between expression and allusion, or between saying and showing: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical."[33] In the final instance, however, what is at stake in this revelation or manifestation is not the process of a laborious and ongoing operation but rather a punctual, evanescent, and well-nigh atemporal act.

4. This notion of the act is without a doubt the most important element in the formal characterization of any antiphilosophy, namely, the reliance on a radical gesture that alone has the force of destituting, and occasionally overtaking, the philosophical category of truth. It is precisely the absence of any such alternative to philosophical truth that constitutes one of the major obstacles to considering Heidegger an antiphilosopher, since even in the guise of "thinking," the destruction of metaphysics remains foreign to the vicious discrediting of truth as such. By contrast, beyond the horizon of mere language or propositional knowledge, antiphilosophers typically posit the

[32] Borges, "A Yellow Rose," *Dreamtigers*, trans. Mildred Boyer and Harold Morland, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1964, p. 38.

[33] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico–philosophicus*, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness, New York, Routledge, 2001, 6.522.

possibility of some radical act such as Pascal's "wager," Kierkegaard's "leap of faith," Nietzsche's "breaking in two of history," or Lacan and Žižek's own notion of the "act," whether strictly analytical (as in the still unpublished book XV of Lacan's *Seminar*, from 1967-1968, precisely entitled *The Psychoanalytical Act* and appropriately interrupted by the events of May '68: "It is well-known that I introduced the psychoanalytical act, and I take it that it was not by accident that the upheaval of May should have prevented me from reaching its end"[34]) or ethical and political in a much broader sense (as in the case of Žižek's rapidly growing corpus of writings). Unlike in Badiou's treatment of the "event," with which it is sometimes conflated, what matters in this "act" is not its impersonal truth so much as its – cathartic of therapeutic – effect on the subject.

5. This decisive role of the listening and speaking subject constitutes another feature that is typical of antiphilosophy. Indeed, the experience of traversing a radical act not only gives precedence to the personal form and effectiveness over and above the impersonal truth content, but it also seems that this experience cannot be transmitted except in a near-autobiographical style that is inseparable from the subject of the enunciation. This is the experimental, writerly side of antiphilosophers, present in Nietzsche's aphorisms, Kierkegaard's diaries, Lacan's seminars, Saint Paul's epistles, or – why not? – Žižek's videos and unique performances as a speaker:

> From Pascal's *Mémorial* to the inclusion by Lacan, at the heart of his seminars, of his personal and institutional fate, from Rousseau's *Confessions* to "Why I am a Destiny" by Nietzsche, from Kierkegaard and Regina's tribulations to Wittgenstein's battles with sexual and suicidal temptation, the antiphilosopher climbs in person onto the public stage to expose his thought. Why? Because as opposed to the regulated anonymity of science, and against everything in philosophy that claims to speak in the name of the universal, the antiphilosophical act, which is without precedent or guarantee, has only itself and its effects to offer by way of attesting to its value.[35]

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[34] Lacan, "Radiophonie," *Autres écrits*, p. 427.

[35] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 20. See also *Logiques des mondes*, p. 582 and *Saint Paul*, p. 17. Badiou's comments on Žižek go very much in the same direction: "The Lacanian who is the most inclined to invest notions of mastery into the most varied 'bodies' of contemporary appearing is certainly Slavoj Žižek, whose lack of affiliation to any one group of psychoanalysts gives him a freedom he gladly abuses with witticisms, repetitions, a delicious love for the kitchiest movies, an unbounded pornography, conceptual journalism, calculated histrionics, puns.... In the end he re-

As a result, the antiphilosopher rarely publishes an organic work but typically wavers between the esoteric fragment and the delights of incompleteness: "This format, in which the opportunity for action takes precedent over the preocuppation with making a name for oneself through publication ('poubellications,' as Lacan used to say), evinces one of the antiphilosopher's characteristic traits: he writes neither system nor treatise, nor even really a book. He propounds a speech of rupture, and writing ensues when necessary."[36] In order to produce such a speech of rupture, the antiphilosopher's declarations require the immediate presence of the speaking subject within his speech. Whence the somewhat frenetic, highly theatrical race to precede and often undercut what is said with references to the incomparable existential power of its saying:

> The antiphilosopher thus necessarily speaks *in his proper name*, and must show this "proper" as real proof of his saying. In effect, he has no validation, nor any compensation, for his act except immanent to this act itself, since he denies that this act can ever be justified in the order of theory. [...] The biographical impulse, the taste for confession, and even in the end a kind of infatuation which is clearly recognizable and which commands the "writerly" style of antiphilosophers (going back to the list, there is not a single one who is not a master of language): these are the necessary consequences of the most intimate antiphilosophical certainty, the one which consists, against millenia of philosophy, in having to announce and practise, in one's own name only, an active salvific break.[37]

Insofar as the antiphilosopher's diatribes against philosophy are supported only by the contrast with the radicality – not to say authenticity – of the declaration of the act as such, only the personal, even physical manifestation of the subject behind the declaration can give it credence and, so to speak, make it pass. For example, when Lacan affirms at the very end of his "Allocution on Teaching": "Truth may not be convincing, knowledge passes in the act."[38] But what is meant by the "act" of antiphilosophy?

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sembles Lacan with this perpetual theatricalization, animated by an assumed desire for bad taste," in *Logiques des mondes*, pp. 587–588.

[36] Badiou, *Saint Paul,* p. 31.

[37] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, saintete," p. 21.

[38] Lacan, "Allocution sur l'enseignement," *Autres écrits*, p. 305. Badiou, in his unpublished seminar, will thus define the Lacanian act as the "passing into knowledge" of the real, whereby the French *passe en savoir* should also be understood as the homonymous *pas sans savoir*, that is, "not without knowing." The typical antiphilosoph-

4.

Before returning to Badiou's favorite examples from Nietzsche or Wittgenstein, it might be useful, for purely didactic purposes if nothing more, to quote Borges's two definitions of the aesthetic act. The first of these concludes the opening essay in *Other Inquisitions*, "The Wall and the Books," where Borges seeks to understand the enigma behind the emperor Shi Huang Ti's simultaneous destruction of the library and the construction of the Chinese wall:

> Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces molded by time, certain twilights and certain places – all these are trying to tell us something, or have told us something we should not have missed, or are about to tell us something; that imminence of a revelation that is not yet produced is, perhaps, the aesthetic act.[39]

The second definition of the act is part of Borges's attempt, in the prologue to the 1964 edition of his *Obra poética* (Collected Poetry), to define what he calls "the aesthetics of Berkeley":

> The taste of the apple (states Berkeley) lies in the contact of the fruit with the palate, not in the fruit itself; analogously (I would say) poetry lies in the commerce of the poem with the reader, not in the series of symbols registered on the pages of a book. The essential aspect is the aesthetic act, the *thrill*, the physical modification provoked by each reading. Perhaps this is nothing new, but at my age novelties matter less than truth.[40]

In this last sentence, moreover, we can see how the search for a radical act – in this case an aesthetic or archi-aesthetic one – in fact allows the an-

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ical binary of truth and meaning thus becomes triangulated through knowledge. Technically, there would be no truth of the real – and hence, despite Žižek's claims to the contrary, no Lacanian politics of truth, at least not without quotation marks around the "truth" – but only a passage of the real into knowledge by way of an impasse of formalization, whose model is mathematical and whose mimicry in the act can therefore be called archi-scientific.

[39] Borges, "The Wall and the Books," *Other Inquisitions*, p. 5 (translation modified in order to render *el hecho estético* as "the aesthetic act" rather than as "the aesthetic fact," since behind *hecho* we should hear echoes of *hacer* and *hacedor*, as in Greek *poiein* and *poiètès*).

[40] Borges, *Obra poética 1923–1964*, Buenos Aires, Emecé, 1964, p. 11.

tiphilosopher to redefine "truth" itself, rather than to jettison it altogether. If this category is maintained at all, what matters is then above all the experiential content or the effect caused in the subject, particularly as speaking subject: "The relationship of the act to writing concerns, not *what* is said, but the effect of what is said, which implies a putting down of the said."[41]

Here, just as the logic of the remainder seems almost inevitably to invite misogynist language, the importance of the change that the act causes in the subject is what pushes almost every antiphilosopher in the direction of a profound tie – whether antagonistic or (more frequently) favorable – to Christianity. As Badiou writes about the act in Wittgenstein's case: "The effect of the archiaesthetic act must not concern thought or doctrine but the subject, which means life (or the world) seized from its limit. This is why the act is in its element in Christianity."[42] The author of the *Tractatus* himself, indeed, had written in the 1950s: "I think that one of the things that Christianity says is that all good doctrines are useless. That you must change your life."[43] Already in a posthumous note from 1883, Nietzsche had asserted something very similar, albeit this time *against* the sickness of Christianity: "It is not enough to transmit a doctrine; it is also necessary violently to transform the people so that they accept it. This is what Zarathustra finally understood."[44] This is also, we might add, what every antiphilosopher understands, against the doctrines that philosophy is able to transmit.

After the treatment of woman, the defining role of Christianity could thus be considered a second derivatory feature of antiphilosophy:

> The connection of Christianity to modern antiphilosophy has a long history. We can easily draw up the list of antiphilosophers of strong caliber: Pascal, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Lacan. What jumps to the eye is that four of these stand in an essential relation to Christianity: Pascal, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein; that the enraged hatred of Nietzsche is itself at least as strong a bond as love, which alone explains that the Nietzsche of the "Letters from madness" can sign indifferently as "Dionysos" or "the Crucified"; that Lacan, the only true rationalist of the group – but also the one who *completes* the cycle of modern antiphilosophy – nonetheless holds Christianity to be decisive for the constitution of the subject of science,

[41] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 49.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] Nietzsche as quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Il soggetto e la maschera: Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione*, Milan, Bompiani, 1974, p. 349.

and that it is in vain that we hope to untie ourselves from the religious theme, which is structural.[45]

Either religion is the temptation of meaning present within all philosophy that antiphilosophy must fight off, or else the experience of conversion on the road to Damascus serves as the prime model, the exemplary matrix, for the antiphilosophical act. In both scenarios, though, the act draws much of its energy, if not its subject-matter, from religion, especially from Christianity.

5.

In the case of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan, Badiou qualifies their antiphilosophical act respectively as "archi-political," "archi-aesthetic," and "archi-scientific." Leaving Lacan's case for another time and place, let us take a closer look at Badiou's reading of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. What matters in this reading concerns not only the antiphilosopher but also the philosopher, since it is in dialogue with the latter's portrayal as part of the antiphilosophical diatribe that philosophy can and must redefine its own operations in relation to the truth of an event.

The crucial point lies in understanding the difference between act and event. The same historical or empirical "happenings" may be involved in both cases, such as an actual revolutionary uprising or an unique artistic performance, but antiphilosophy's treatment of such happenings as "acts" follows a series of protocols that are not to be confused with their treatment as "events" that function as the conditions of truth for philosophy.

Thus, Wittgenstein's act certainly has much to do with art, especially

[45] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 18–19. The fact that Lacan for Badiou *completes* the cycle of contemporary antiphilosophy may seem to present an obstacle to anyone who would claim the status of antiphilosopher for thinkers after Lacan such as Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's case, however, could very well be compared to Kant's, as described above (footnote 31). That is, Žižek's work, which never ceases to call itself philosophical (primarily over and against cultural studies in which willy-nilly it found itself inscribed in the Anglo-American world), could be said to reaccomodate antiphilosophy to philosophy, in particular under the orthodox authorization of Kant and Hegel. Friendships and appearances of theoretical convergence notwithstanding, this approach is the opposite of Badiou's, who proposes to differentiate the two, all the while drawing crucial lessons from antiphilosophy for the purposes of defining the operations of philosophy, whereas all genuine philosophy today always already would seem to be an antiphilosophy for Žižek.

music as the epitome of nonpropositional sense since at least Schopenhauer, but antiphilosophy also adds a radical and originary dimension to its view of art, by absorbing its energy back into its own discourse and appropriating it for its unique purposes alone. This added dimension explains the archi-aesthetic nature of the act in the case of Wittgenstein:

> The antiphilosophical act consists in letting what there is be manifested, insofar as "what there is" is precisely that which no true proposition can say. If Wittgenstein's antiphilosophical act can legitimately be declared archi-aesthetic, it is because this "letting-be" has the nonpropositional form of a pure showing, of *clarity*, and because such clarity happens to the unsayable only in the form of a work without thought (the paradigm for such donation is certainly music for Wittgenstein). I say *archi*-aesthetic because it is not a question of substituting art for philosophy either. It is a question of bringing into the scientific and propositional activity the principle of a clarity whose (mystical) element is beyond this activity, and the real paradigm of which is art. It is thus a question of firmly establishing the laws of the sayable (of the thinkable), in order for the unsayable (the unthinkable, which is ultimately given only in the form of art) to be *situated* as the "upper limit" of the sayable itself.[46]

Similarly, in Nietzsche's case, the idea of "grand politics" as the act of breaking in two the history of the world certainly is inspired by the political revolution, but again philosophy (as antiphilosophy) appropriates the revolutionary event for its own purposes, before relying on the explosive radicalism of the archi-political act that is thus formed as leverage to reject all actually existing politics, including revolutionary politics, as being inauthentic in comparison:

> Nietzsche adopts with regard to the revolutionary act a rapport of formal fascination and substantive repulsion. He proposes for himself to render formally equivalent the philosophical act as an act of thought and the apparent explosive power of the politico-historical revolution. In this sense, though it is difficult to perceive, I hold that there is a primordial suture to politics itself at work in the Nietzschean dispositif. The philosophical act is, I would say, *archi-political*, in that it proposes itself to revolutionize all of humanity on a more radical level than that of the calculations of politics. From this let us retain that archi-politics

[46] Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 17.

> does not designate the traditional philosophical purpose of finding a ground for politics. The logic, once again, is a logic of rivalry, and not one of founding oversight [surplomb fondateur]. It is the philosophical act itself that is archi-political, in the sense that its historical explosion will show, retroactively, that the political revolution properly speaking has not been truthful, or has not been authentic.[47]

If, through antiphilosophy's linkage onto politics, the revolutionary event is reabsorbed into the antiphilosopher's own discourse, then a circular argument becomes inevitable. Nietzsche must both and at the time declare that he *prepares* an event more radical than any effective politico-historical event and *guarantee* the authenticity of this break solely on this basis of this very declaration. Whence the difficulty of deciding whether Nietzsche, through Zarathustra, merely prepares the overman or whether he is already the first overman himself:

> I think that this circle, which manifests itself here in a subjective exposure whose sincerity is almost that of a certain saintliness, is in truth the circle of all archi-politics. Since it does not count the event as its condition, but rather detains it or pretends to detain it in the act of thought itself, it cannot discriminate its effectivity from its announcement. The entire persona of Zarathustra names this circle and gives the book its tone of strange undecidability on the question of whether Zarathustra is the figure of the act's effectivity or the figure of its prophecy pure and simple.[48]

This is why Nietzsche, even more so than any other antiphilosopher, must necessarily appear in person within his own speech. Badiou goes so far as to define Nietzsche's madness in terms of this very circle, in which the enunciating subject so to speak falls into his own enunciations, whereas all philosophy would precisely be able to do without the question of "Who speaks?":

> I would hold that the question "who?," whenever it insists or returns, suppresses the most originary gesture of philosophy, which, under the condition of mathematics, has precisely deployed the dialogical theme, that is to say, the theme of a statement that is possibly subtracted from the originariness of the question "who?". Philosophy has been possible

[47] Badiou, *Casser en deux l'histoire du monde*, p. 11.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

> only by admitting the possibility of an anonymous statement, that is to say, a statement whose examination and circulation do not depend immediately on the question of who formulates it.[49]

As we will see, Nietzsche's archi-political and Wittgenstein's archi-aesthetic act impose on us the task of clarifying, by way of contrast, the operations with which philosophy approaches the event. And yet, we will also see that antiphilosophy, aside from providing the philosopher with a series of respectable and perhaps indispensable interlocutors, presents a constant temptation within Badiou's own philosophy.

Before formulating a series of questions and lessons to be drawn from the rivalry between philosophy and antiphilosophy in Badiou's interpretation, however, I want to supplement the list of invariant traits with what is perhaps the quintessential phrase in the stylebook of the antiphilosopher, a quote which Borges by way of James Boswell attributes to William Henry Hudson, in his essay "About *The Purple Land*," from *Other Inquisitions*: "Improving the perfection of a phrase divulged by Boswell, Hudson says that many times in his life he undertook the study of metaphysics, but happiness always interrupted him."[50] Borges, like most antiphilosophers, thus typically discredits philosophy's claims by appealing to the intensity of a subjective or existential experience, the thrill of which is alone capable of producing actual happiness. In fact, already Wittgenstein had felt the need to rely on art, but also on religion, in particular Christianity, so as to allude to that unsayable sense of the world which makes life both "beautiful" and "happy," as he noted in his diary, talking about Nietzsche: "To tell the truth Christianity is the only path that leads with certainty to happiness," whereby happiness, as Badiou comments, "designates life with sense (the world practiced according to its sense, which is, as was the case for Pascal, absent from the world itself)."[51] This goal – which in addition to happiness often receives the connotation of a certain saintliness – is ultimately that for which philosophy, according to its antiphilosophical detractors or secret competitors, can only be an obstacle that must be removed but also ridiculed.

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[50] Borges, "About *The Purple Land*," *Other Inquisitions*, p. 144.

[51] Wittgenstein, quoted in Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, New York and London, Penguin, 1990, p. 122; Badiou, "Silence, solipsisme, sainteté," p. 19.

6.

As for the lessons to be drawn from this confrontation with antiphilosophy, we might say that the latter imposes important revisions on the two concepts of suture and disaster, as they are developed respectively in Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy* and *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*.

"Suture," in Badiou's *Manifesto*, names the operation whereby philosophy, instead of giving equal weight to each of its four conditions that are the truth procedures of art, science, politics, and love, cancels itself out and delegates its powers to a single one of these procedures, for example, to science during the positivist suture of philosophy, to politics during the Marxist-Leninist suture, to poetry with Heidegger, and potentially to love (or friendship) with Lévinas and Derrida. A suture happens, in other words, when "philosophy *delegates* its functions to one or other of its conditions, handing over the whole of thought to *one* generic procedure. Philosophy is then carried out in the element of its own suppression to the great benefit of that procedure."[52] Badiou's reading of Nietzsche's letters and notes from his final period of madness, however, presupposes a rather different understanding of the process of suture. Here, philosophy does not abdicate its own act in favor of grand politics or art so much as it appropriates the power of the revolutionary break – together with the formal resources of poetry to guarantee its prophetic transmission – for its own sake, with a paradoxical denigration of effective politics as its result. The logic is much more one of mimicry and rivalry than one of abdication and self-effacement. The lesson is thus that in order to avoid falling in the traps of antiphilosophy, philosophy would have to develop a relation to its conditions that, thanks to a measure of restraint, circumvents the temptations of suture in this other sense as well. Even despite a long justificatory note in *Logics of Worlds* about the compatibility of Badiou's function as a philosopher who by definition thinks in terms of eternal truths and his role as a militant engaged in a time-bound historical mode of politics, however, this relation of philosophy to its conditions and the operations with which it treats them – that is, the philosophical rather than the antiphilosophical understanding of its own act – receives little explanations beyond the play of "seizing" and "being seized by" already proposed in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, now translated in the dangerously idealist concept-metaphors of "sublimation," "formalization," and "(re)nomination."[53]

This relative silence perhaps explains why Badiou's philosophy does not

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[52] Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, p. 61.
[53] Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, pp. 544–547.

always manage to stave off its own antiphilosophical tendencies. With this notion I am no longer referring only to the temptation against which Badiou himself, thanks to his dialogue with antiphilosophy, puts us on guard and which is nothing more than the religious temptation of sense or meaning: "Anti-philosophy puts philosophy on guard. It shows it the ruses of sense and the dogmatic danger if truth. It teaches it that the rupture with religion is never definitive. That one must take up the task again. That truth must, once again and always, be secularised."[54] But I would say that antiphilosophy teaches us that the real danger, including for Badiou's own philosophy, is not the religion of meaning but rather the radicalism of the pure event as absolute beginning, or the treatment of the event as some kind of archi-event, that is to say, in the end, the conflation of the event with the act.

The act, which otherwise could be considered simply the antiphilosophical name of the event, functions very differently in antiphilosophy from the event in philosophy. Politics, art, or science for the antiphilosopher serve not as conditions but as models to be imitated and absorbed into philosophy itself as though the latter, qua antiphilosophy, were capable of producing, or even of being, a grand event in its own right. This would mark a "disaster," but not in the sense of Badiou's *Ethics*, which defines the term as a complete forcing of a given situation, including the point that should remain unnameable, in the name of truth: "This is why I will call this figure of Evil a disaster, a disaster of truth induced by the absolutization of its power."[55] Instead, antiphilosophy presents us with a disaster that is closer to the way the term is used in the essays from *Conditions* appended to the English translation of the *Manifesto*, where philosophy is said to expose thought to disaster by imagining that its empty category of truth can be filled and legitimated with extreme, even criminal prescriptions:

> The key to this turnabout is that philosophy is worked from within by the chronic temptation of taking the operation of the empty category of Truth as identical to the multiple procedures of the production of truths. Or else: that philosophy, renouncing the operational singularity of the seizing of truths, is *itself* presented as being a truth procedure. Which also means that it is presented as an art, a science, a passion or a policy. Nietzsche's philosopher-poet; Husserl's wish of philosophy as a rigorous science; Pascal or Kierkegaard's wish of philosophy as intense

[54] Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?," p. 10.

[55] Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London and New York, Verso, 2001, p. 85.

experience; Plato's philosopher-king: as many intra-philosophical schemata of the permanent possibility of disaster.[56]

This leads me, in a final series of questions, to ask whether there are not also similarly disastrous antiphilosophical tendencies at work in Badiou's own thought. And if so, where?

7.

It is not just that philosophy, in its efforts to disentangle itself from its antiphilosophical opponents, must continue to sever its ties to religion. Badiou, in his unpublished seminar on Lacan's antiphilosophy, is certainly clear and adamant enough about this obligation, which constantly forces philosophy to perform an immanent scission from the religious element.[57] In this sense, though, and in spite of the crucial role played by Christianity, it is somewhat overhasty to equate antiphilosophy itself with religion's predilection for the ineffable, in the way Peter Hallward does in his otherwise exemplary study of Badiou's philosophy: "Antiphilosophy is religion in philosophical guise, argued on philosophical terrain," or again: "Antiphilosophy proclaims an ineffable, transcendent Meaning, grasped in the active refutation of philosophical pretensions to truth."[58] While this certainly holds true for the case of Wittgenstein or Pascal, to accept this equation as a general fact would be tantamount to ignoring Lacan's attack on philosophy proper as driven by a religious search for meaning, which is precisely the stupidity from which

[56] Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, pp. 128–129. Badiou's list of names should suffice to conclude that the temptation of disaster, understood in this sense, is not unique to antiphilosophers but applies to Husserl or Plato as well – and no doubt even to a Platonist such as Badiou, as I argue here.

[57] From Badiou's 1994–1995 seminar on *L'antiphilosophie lacanienne*, see in particular the session of January 18, 1995.

[58] Hallward, *Badiou*, p. 20. There might be good reasons to hold on to this equation: Hallward can thus claim that Badiou avoids the religious dimension of antiphilosophy only by radicalizing the purely subtractive, nonrelational, or antidialectical character of the event – to which Hallward can then oppose the demand for a relational philosophy, which would be sorely missing from Badiou's oeuvre. My ongoing polemic with this interpretation could be summarized by saying that Hallward's portrayal (like that of Daniel Bensaïd) actually depicts a one-sided image of Badiou as a complete antiphilosopher, or as someone who is more radically antiphilosophical than all known antiphilosophers, whereas in my eyes there are plenty of elements in this thinker's rebuttal against antiphilosophy that can serve the purpose of a more relational (even dialectical) understanding of the event.

antiphilosophy seeks to awaken us. Similarly, without having to invoke Nietzsche's Anti-Christ, even Badiou's book on Saint Paul underscores the extent to which this ancient antiphilosopher, while evidently central to all subsequent Christian doctrine, nevertheless keeps the mystical or obscurantist discourse at arm's length, to the point that "it cannot be denied that there is in him, and he is alone in this among the recognized apostles, an ethical dimension of antiobscurantism. For Paul will not permit the Christian declaration to justify itself through the ineffable."[59] Thus, not only would it be imprecise to equate antiphilosophy and religion but it is precisely one of antiphilosophy's negative lessons that religion continues to lie in wait behind philosophy's love of truth as meaning.

However, aside from the religious urge, there is also another way of defining the antiphilosophical temptation at work within Badiou's philosophy, for which the book on Saint Paul again can serve as a good case in point. Indeed, I would say that there is a profound oscillation that runs through this study between, on one hand, an effort to delimit Paul's antiphilosophy as a discourse to be traversed and yet kept at a distance, and, on the other, a deep fascination with the ultraradicalism of this discourse, whose traits – including stylistic ones – as a result come to transferred almost invisibly onto Badiou's own philosophy as well, both in this book and elsewhere. It thus becomes frequently impossible in *Saint Paul* to discern whether general statements regarding truth, the act, the subject, and so on, belong to the antiphilosophical aspect of the Apostle's doctrine, which therefore would have to be rejected, or whether they can in addition be attributed, as if written in a free indirect style, to Badiou's own theory of the event. This theory, in fact, is by no means impeded but thrives on such indiscernibility.

If we are to take Badiou's word for it, Paul's antiphilosophical tendency can be circumvented fairly easily by separating the invariant form of his proposal from the fable of its religious or mythical content. "It will be objected that, in the present case, for us 'truth' designates a mere fable. Granted, but what is important is the subjective gesture grasped in its founding power with respect to the generic conditions of universality, Badiou writes: "That the content of the fable must be abandoned leaves as its remainder the form of these conditions and, in particular, the ruin of every attempt to assign the discourse of truth to preconstituted historical aggregates."[60] But I would ar-

[59] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 52.

[60] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 6. See also the conclusion: "In reality, the Pauline break has a bearing upon the formal conditions and the inevitable consequences of a consciousness-of-truth rooted in a pure event, detached from every objectivist assignation to

gue that there is also something about the form itself – the form of the pure event – that is radically antiphilosophical, as Badiou himself shows more clearly in the case of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. Consider, for example, the following statements (many more could be quoted), in which the attributed speech is quickly followed by a free indirect style that makes it impossible to decide whether the position being described is Paul's or Badiou's, or both.

For Paul, the emergence of the instance of the son is essentially tied to the conviction that "Christian discourse" is absolutely *new*. The formula according to which God sent us his Son signifies primarily an intervention within History, one through which it is, as Nietzsche will put it, "broken in two," rather than governed by a transcendent reckoning in conformity withy the laws of an epoch.[61] It is pure event, opening of an epoch, transformation of the relations between the possible and the impossible:[62]

> For Paul, the event has not come to prove something; it is pure beginning. Christ's resurrection is neither an argument nor an accomplishment. There is no proof of the event; nor is the event a proof.[63]

No wonder that Badiou, in most of these instances in *Saint Paul* where "the pure event" or "the naked event" is invoked as a radical beginning, tends immediately to turn to a comparison with Nietzsche's archi-political act of breaking the history of the world in two halves, even though elsewhere, for example in Badiou's *Ethics*, this act is called a disaster: "Nietzsche is Paul's rival far more than his opponent. Both share the same desire to initiate a new epoch in human history, the same conviction that man can and must be overcome, the same certainty that we must have done with guilt and law."[64] What emerges more clearly from Badiou's discussion of Nietzsche is the possibility that this desire for an absolute beginning is a deviation due to the influence of antiphilosophy, whose extremism the philosopher would therefore have the task of tempering, even if he allows its appeal to extend to the theory of the event. Even in *Saint Paul*, while discussing the rivaling proximity between Paul and Nietzsche, Badiou insists: "The truth is that both brought antiphilosophy to the point where it no longer consists in a 'critique,' however radical, of the whims and pettinesses of the metaphysician or

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the particular laws of a world or society yet concretely destined to become inscribed within a world and within a society" (pp. 107–108).

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 72. Badiou discusses Nietzsche's disaster in *Ethics*, p. 84.

sage. A much more serious matter is at issue: that of bringing about through the event an unqualified affirmation of life against the reign of death and the negative."[65] Is this not also the case of Badiou's conception of the event, which as a consequence would have to be considered as carrying an irresistible element of antiphilosophy within it?

In political terms, we could call this element the speculative leftism, or ultraleftism, that is common to all antiphilosophers. "This imaginary wager upon an absolute novelty – 'to break in two the history of the world' – fails to recognize that the real of the conditions of possibility of intervention is always the circulation of an already decided event," Badiou writes in *Being and Event*: "What the doctrine of the event teaches us is rather that the entire effort lies in following the event's consequences, not in glorifying its occurrence. There is no more an angelic herald of the event than there is a hero. Being does not commence."[66] In most if not all cases, furthermore, this speculative leftism is nearly indistinguishable – in yet another characteristic vacillation – from its ideological opposite. Going over the list, there is not a single one among the antiphilosophers whose potential leftist leanings are not counterbalanced by suspicions of reactionary consequences, making their politics nearly impossible to pin down: "Antipolitics, one could say, parallel to antiphilosophy."[67] It is precisely such ultraradicalism that lurks behind the pure form of the event as defined on the basis of Christianity in Badiou's book on Paul. In other words, the crucial point to be grasped in this regard is not just the split between good form (the protocol of evental universalization) and objectionable content (the fable of Christianity and the Resurrection) but how antiphilosophy leads to a skewed understanding of the radical break of the event, including in its purely formal aspect, as some kind of archi-event (which is what I would call the antiphilosophical deviation of the event qua act).

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Let me rephrase this in the terms specific to Badiou's interpretation of Paul – an interpretation which, as a result of its very own antiphilosophi-

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London, Continuum, 2005, pp. 210–211. See also *Théorie du sujet*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1982: "The deviation on the left follows a perspective of flight. It is a radicalism of novelty. It breaks all mirrors" (p. 223).

[67] Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

cal tendencies, will turn out to be far more ambivalent than appears at first sight. In the chapter "Texts and Contexts," Badiou discusses one of the most important "deviations" or "threatening divisions" from within Paul's doctrine, namely, "the upsurge of a heresy that one could call ultra-Pauline, that of Marcion, at the beginning of the second century," according to which the break between the Old and the New Testaments is so absolute as to leave no room whatsoever for mediation, and for which Paul would be the only genuine apostle: "By pushing a little, one could arrive at Marcion's conception: the new gospel is an absolute beginning."[68] Badiou for sure is clear about his conviction that this does in fact constitute a heresy, devoid of any real foundation in the Pauline corpus. "There is no text of Paul's from which one could draw anything resembling Marcion's doctrine," he says, adding: "That Paul emphasizes rupture rather than continuity with Judaism is not in doubt. But this is a militant, and not an ontological, thesis. Divine unicity bridges the two situations separated by the Christ-event, and at no moment is it cast into doubt."[69] And yet, as we already saw above, Badiou on numerous occasions seems to identify his own position with the doctrine of the event as a complete break, an absolute caesura, or a radical beginning: "It was a thunderbolt, a caesura, and not a dialectical reversal."[70] Thus, it is not difficult to sustain that this doctrine, under the alluring influence of the antiphilosophical act, shows traces that bely its own proximity to the heresy of ultra-Paulinism.

Another way of discussing this strong antiphilosophical temptation in the terms proper to Badiou's *Saint Paul* is through the questions of dialectical mediation, the relation of an event to its site, and the connection between subjectivation and the subjective process of fidelity. In fact, these are merely three perspectives from which to pose one and the same underlying problem, concerning the relation of any given truth to the state of affairs in which it first arises. In each case, the antiphilosopher's tendency will consist in stressing the unmediated, disconnected, and wholly subjective nature of the truth of an event. Badiou's own antiphilosophical temptation thus repeatedly leads to an overemphasis on the antidialectic of truth and actuality. Every antiphilosophy, in other words, at the same time propounds an antidialectic. "This de-dialectization of the Christ-event allows us to extract a formal, wholly secularized conception of grace from the mythological core," we read in

[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35. In *Théorie du sujet*, Badiou also compares the political "deviations" to religious "heresies," especially right–wing Arianism (for whom Christ is merely human) and left–wing Gnosticism (for whom Christ is purely divine).

[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Saint Paul: "Grace, consequently, is not a 'moment' of the Absolute. It is affirmation without preliminary negation; it is what comes upon us in caesura of the law. It is pure and simple *encounter*."[71] Grace, caesura, encounter – so many antiphilosophical and antidialectical concept-metaphors for the event qua pure act.

This stress put on the event as radical novelty, absolute beginning, or clean slate ignores the extent to which an event is always tied to a specific situation by way of its site. Badiou himself thus forewarns us: "That the event is new should never let us forget that it is such only with respect to a determinate situation, wherein it mobilizes the elements of its site," which makes that an event is always an event *for* this or that situation and not just an event referring only to itself as sovereign self-belonging: "The evental site is that datum that is immanent to a situation and enters into the composition of the event itself, addressing it to *this* singular situation, rather than another."[72] In fact, much of *Saint Paul* revolves precisely around this question of the relation of the event of Christ's coming to its site, as defined by the discourses of Greek philosophy, Jewish religion, and Roman law. This is one way in which the book develops and expands a relatively understudied question from *Being and Event*: "What is the exact relation between the supposed universality of the postevental truth (that is, what is inferred from Christ's resurrection) and the evental site, which is, indubitably, the nation bound together by the Old Testament?"[73] A reading of *Saint Paul* that focuses on the pure, naked event, without including its linkage to the situation via its site, at best is unilateral and at worst misses the book's actual innovation. And yet, we are also seeing that there are good reasons to hold onto such a reading. Paul himself and the antiphilosopher who is always lurking in Badiou, in effect, typically downplay the dialectic between the old and the new, between truth and its site, or between saintliness and actuality, whose difficult matchup would be Paul's most daunting legacy to the philosopher.

Similarly, if all that matters is the brief intensity of the event's upsurge, then we might as well equate, in strict antiphilosophical fashion, subject and subjectivation: "In the guise of the event, the subject *is* subjectivation."[74] But, unless the event is reduced to a vanishing cause of hysterical subjectivation,

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[71] *Ibid*., p. 66. If every antiphilosophy proposes an antidialectic, however, we are left wondering how Badiou can affirm that Pascal, Rousseau, Mallarmé, and Lacan, who are all antiphilosophers, stand before us as the four great French dialecticians. See Belhaj Kacem, *Événement et répétition*, p. 229.

[72] Badiou, *ibid*., p. 70.

[73] *Ibid*., p. 22.

[74] *Ibid*., p. 81.

which disappears no sooner than it appears, all truth in addition requires that a new consistency and even a new law be elaborated in the process of an ongoing fidelity: "The trajectory of a truth, which institutes its subject as detached from the statist law of the situation, is nonetheless consistent according to another law: the one that, addressing the truth to everyone, universalizes the subject."[75] Paul, in this sense, would actually have had an intuition that runs counter to an invariant trait of all antiphilosophy, which privileges the hysteric's instantaneous declaration over and above the philosopher's discourse of mastery: "Paul has the intuition that every subject is the articulation of a subjectivation and a consistency. This also means that there is no instantaneous salvation; grace itself is no more than the indication of a possibility. The subject has to be given in his labor, and not only in his sudden emergence."[76] More often than not, though, the emphasis falls heavily on the subjective upsurge as radically and completely subtracted from all processual and objectivist inscription: "For the event's sudden emergence never follows from the existence of an evental site. Although it requires conditions of immanence, that sudden emergence nevertheless remains of the order of grace."[77]

Finally, there is the question of style. Badiou's own writing, both in *Saint Paul* itself and elsewhere, could be described in terms of the characteristics attributed to the Apostle's letters. The event of Christ's coming reduced to a pure beginning, thus, can be transmitted only in the most lapidary of writing styles: "Only a concentrated style, shorn of the mannerisms of prophetic and thaumaturgical literature, can be appropriate to such a reduction. There is no doubt that Paul is a superlative writer: condensed, lapidary, knowing just when to unleash unusual and powerful images."[78] These attributes, without exception, are all applicable to Badiou's own writing, particularly in the classical transparency and concision of *Being and Event*. Even the role of mathematics is meant like a bulldozer to clear the ground of all obscure imagery, all veiled indecision, and all fake profundity, just as Paul stays clear of Jesus Christ's parables and miracles. "But ultimately, what matters so far as this prose is concerned is argumentation and delimitation, the forceful extraction of an essential core of thought," we read in *Saint Paul*: "There is in his prose, under the imperative of the event, something solid and timeless, something that, precisely because it is a question of orienting thought

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[76] *Ibid.,* pp. 91–92. Cf. earlier: "Fidelity to the declaration is crucial, for truth is a process, and not an illumination" (p. 15).

[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

toward the universal *in its sudden emerging singularity*, but independently of all anecdote, is intelligible to us without having to resort to cumbersome historical mediations."[79] But is this not also what makes of Paul an antiphilosopher? Or, to put this the other way around, should we not say that the extraction of an essential core of thought – a doctrine of the pure event – shorn off from all historical mediations and actual occurrences contributes to, or stems from, the antiphilosophical trend in Badiou's own thinking?

9.

For sure, there is a price to be paid for this style of timeless singularity. We saw this most clearly in the case of Nietzsche, whose "grand politics" relates to effective historico-political events such as the French Revolution, not as conditions but as models to mimick and, if possible, to outperform. But something similar occurs, I would argue, with Badiou's philosophical treatment of certain events, say Mallarmé's poetry or Beckett's prose. The latter, thus, in the hands of the philosopher almost by necessity, if not because of some kind of professional deformation, tend to become self-contained exemplifications of the event qua event.[80] In fact, perhaps in no other instance is this tendency more palpable than in Badiou's relation to the radical acts declared by antiphilosophers, from Paul to Nietzsche to Lacan, whose references are typically not effective events – with the possible exception of Lacan who is capable of invoking Freud as a really existing prior act and who because of this completes the cycle of contemporary antiphilosophy – but fables or cases of pure folly and self-imploding prophecies: "That the event (or pure act) invoked by antiphilosophers is fictitious does not present a problem. It is equally so in Pascal (it is the same as Paul's), or in Nietzsche (Nietzsche's 'grand politics' did not break the history of the world in two; it was Nietzsche who was broken)."[81]

Badiou's relation to Paul or to Nietzsche, in other words, is similar to the relation of these two antiphilosophers themselves respectively to Christ's Resurrection and to the French Revolution. It is a relation of rivalry and mimicry, developed into an amplified mimetics of the act qua archi-event, whose radicalism cannot fail to seduce the philosopher for it suggests that

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[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 33 and 36.

[80] I discuss the example of Mallarmé in "Art, Politics, History: Notes on Badiou and Rancière," *Inaesthetik*, 0, 2008.

[81] Badiou, *ibid.*, p. 108.

even philosophy, after all, may be able to produce or be an event in its own right. Which is something the philosopher, technically speaking, cannot proclaim without falling in the trap of a disastrous prescription that would at once put him in the camp of antiphilosophy: "Let's say, provisorily, that the antiphilosopher in this sense is *the event of philosophy*," as Medhi Belhaj Kacem writes in an open letter to Badiou: "*Only for the antiphilosopher can philosophy be an event*."[82] Whence, clearly, the seductive power of the antiphilosopher for Badiou as well. Even as a never-ending task, the supposed gap between philosophy and antiphilosophy allows the polemicist to have his cake (to define, by opposition to the act, the empty philosophical concept of the event, conditioned by effective truth procedures) and eat it too (to reabsorb the irrefutable radicality of the act as archi-political, archi-aesthetic, or archi-scientific break or absolute beginning, before discarding it as a mere act, also in the theatrical sense of the term). This is why the philosopher actually thrives on the endless sparring matches with the most illustrious antiphilosophers.

Where does all this leave readers like me, who are neither philosophers nor antiphilosophers and who look upon this polemic with the amused curiosity of someone watching a much publicized matchup in a sport utterly foreign to their own culture? For one thing, it leaves us with the option of finding a middle course – whose task I would call "theory" in close proximity to intermediary discourses that work on specific truth procedures such as psychonanalysis for love or inaesthetics for art – at an equal distance of philosophical discipleship and antiphilosophical revolt: neither blind obedience to the master nor hysterical contestation.[83]

For Badiou, of course, the task is more straight-forward. The philosopher, he will always state, must stay in the closest proximity to the antiphilosopher, who alone keeps him on guard against the temptations of religion, disaster, or the "service of goods" pure and simple. In the end, this would be the legacy that Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Lacan bequeath to those who seek to affirm the possibility of philosophy today:

> I think that all three – but Nietzsche's case is without doubt the most dramatic – in the last instance sacrificed themselves for philosophy. There is in antiphilosophy a movement of putting itself to death, or

[82] Belhaj Kacem, *ibid*, p. 217.

[83] See the conclusion of my "Thinking the Event: Alain Badiou's Philosophy and the Task of Critical Theory," *Emerging Trends in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Todd May, vol. 8 of *The History of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Alan D. Schrift, London, Acumen, forthcoming.

of silencing itself, so that something imperative may be bequeathed to philosophy. Antiphilosophy is always what, at its very extremes, states the new duty of philosophy, or its new possibility in the figure of a new duty. I think of Nietzsche's madness, of Wittgenstein's strange labyrinth, of Lacan's final muteness. In all three cases antiphilosophy takes the form of a legacy. It bequeathes something beyond itself to the very thing that it is fighting against. Philosophy is always the heir to antiphilosophy.[84]

[84] Badiou, "Who Is Nietzsche?," p. 11.